

The use of animation to promote student learning about the importance of mental well-being for tertiary study success



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Introduction

- The Australian tertiary sector, and the legal academy in particular, are becoming increasingly concerned about the psychological well-being of students, and the impact psychological distress has on student learning outcomes.

Concerns about law student well-being

- US research and literature.
- Brain and Mind Research Institute's Report (2009) – high or very high levels of psychological distress
- 741 Law students = 34.2%
- 924 Solicitors = 31%
- 756 Barristers = 16.7%
- Gen Pop (18-34) = 13.3%

Concerns about law student well-being

Further empirical studies:

- Leahy et al - 2010
- Hall, Townes O'Brien and Tang – 2010, 2011
- Larcombe et al – 2011, 2012, 2014
- Lester, England and Antolak-Saper – 2011
- Bergin and Pakenham – 2014.

Concerns about students in other disciplines

- Stallman: Australian university students are an at-risk population who require universal early interventions if their mental health is to be protected (2010, 2011, 2012).
- Leahy et al (2010) – 48% of students in the study.
- University of Melbourne's CSHE's National Summit on the Mental Health of Tertiary Students (2011).
- Larcombe et al (2014-2015) affirming the incidence of elevated levels of psychological distress amongst university students across disciplines.

In what ways does law student psychological distress manifest itself?

- The symptoms of psychological distress identified in a study by Benjamin in the US included:
 - depression,
 - obsessive compulsive behaviour,
 - feelings of inadequacy and inferiority,
 - anxiety,
 - hostility,
 - paranoia,
 - social alienation and
 - isolation.

Debating the possible causes?

- The personality type of students who choose to study law (Daikoff, 1994)
- The competitive and adversarial nature of both legal education and legal culture (BMRI)
- The dominance of extrinsic motivation for law students (Vines et al – UNSW)
- The shift in student thinking skills at law school to a linear/rational approach (Hall et al – ANU)
- Pessimistic thinking styles (adversarial, worst case scenario etc)
- Confusion about professional identity (Hall et al – ANU)
- A lack of engagement in learning (*Australasian Survey of Student Engagement Report* (AUSSE))
- Job prospects and student debt

Despite the unknowns around cause ...

- The BMRI report recommends that we should ‘focus on the known risk factors, to establish supportive environments and to maintain connectedness’ (BMRI, 2009, 43).
- This is a problem for our professional community (BMRI, 2009, 43).

Council of Australian Law Deans

- Promoting Law Student Well-Being: Best Practice Guidelines for Law Schools
- 10 guidelines
- (NHMRC: *Guidelines are sets of non-mandatory rules, principles or recommendations for procedures or practices in a particular field.*)

CALD guidelines for law schools

1. Law schools should foster strong relationships with those who have expertise in promoting the well-being of students.
2. Law Schools should actively educate and disseminate information about mental illness
3. Law Schools should prepare students for normal expected stresses
4. Law Schools should critically evaluate their teaching and learning practices.
5. Law Schools should acknowledge the competitive elements of legal education.

Threshold Learning Outcomes for Law

- TLO 6: Self-management
- Graduates of the Bachelor of Laws will be able to:
 - (a) learn and work independently, and
 - (b) reflect on and assess their own capabilities and performance, and make use of feedback as appropriate, to support personal and professional development.

Law Admissions Consultative Committee

- *PLT Competency Standards for Entry-Level Lawyers* practical legal training providers have a positive duty to ‘make applicants aware of the benefits of developing and maintaining personal wellbeing in their professional and personal lives.’

What should law schools do?

- Start at law school and where the students are.
- Use the curriculum.
- Intentionally design the curriculum.
- Be informed by ethical, theoretical and pedagogical foundations: do no harm, good learning and teaching practice and self-determination theory.

Self-determination theory as a foundation for promoting student well-being

- Intentional curriculum and extra-curricula program design approaches that support student self-regulation can support the three basic psychological needs that humans seek to satisfy in order to thrive:
 - autonomy, competence and relatedness.
- They can promote belonging.
- They can give meaning.

Difficulties in drawing students in

- Difficult to ask law students to engage with mental illness, because stigma still surrounds the issue.
- BMRI stats show a general reluctance to seek professional help.
- May jeopardise future career (fit and proper person)
- Disclosure to admitting authorities

Animation and Law Student Wellbeing

- The purpose of the animation is to invite students in and explore the website
- The QUT Law School under the banner of the “I belong in the LLB” program does a lot of really good things. We want our students to appreciate how important mental wellbeing is.



Awareness

- We want our students to be aware of this resource:
 - To increase their mental health literacy
 - To understand the facts and figures about law student well-being
 - To learn tips and tricks for improving wellbeing
 - To make sure that every student knows about QUT counselling services and how they work

Animation Pros

- Not as confronting
- Interesting and different
- Can edit fairly easily

Animation Cons

- Expensive
- Are we trivialising the issue?
- How can we do this informatively, without offending anyone

What we hope happens

- Increased mental health literacy
- An appreciation that stressors exist in any academic discipline, and in some instances they cannot (and should not) be removed
- Students adopt proactive measures to improve their psychological wellbeing
- Happy, healthy, competent future professionals – in law or otherwise.
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Scene 1: Library.

narration :

Studying law and being a professional in legal practice can be stressful.

Action:

Camera zooming in from the front, zig zagging three dimensionally from person to person before we hit our main person. Suggest not everyone looking stressed and sad (because law school is not really stressful for everyone). One of the desks in the library is wonky and held up by some library books (maybe it wobbles and the student puts another book in to help hold it up).



Scene 1: Library (contd').

narration :

At QUT Law School we are doing all we can to give you the tools to cope with the stresses of legal education and legal practice. We design aspects of our curriculum and extra curricula activities to promote your well-being.

Action:

Background scene fades out and focus on the two characters with thought bubbles indicating what's going on inside their heads, communicating the fact that they are dealing with stressors - workload, time-management, a lot of reading, not feeling like you 'get it', financial pressure, job prospects, but QUT is helping.

A QUT academic enters wearing a mortar board and carrying the QUT tool-belt and puts the tools down on the table - then the academic leaves.



Scene 1: Library(contd').
Close-up on desk.

narration :

Our ultimate goal is for you to become happy, healthy, competent professionals - in law or whatever field you choose. We can't remove all of the stressors associated with legal study and practice, so it is important that we work with you to build and strengthen your psychological well-being and resilience skills.

Action:

We see the collection of inanimate tools and then we see them come to life. (The Ikea idea without the Ikea reference) The choice of tools connects with the skills we are promoting eg an Allen key or screwdriver (helps puts stuff together), spirit gauge ruler (represents balance), clamps (hold things together)



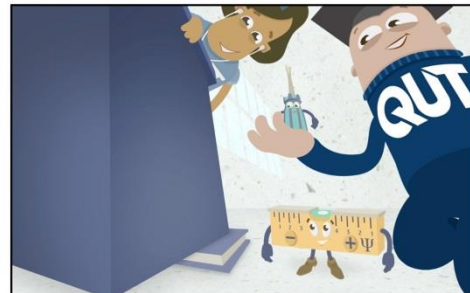
Scene 1: Library(contd').

narration :

This means that our aim is not to simply help you avoid mental illness. We believe that everyone, no matter their baseline level of mental health, can improve their psychological well-being and ultimately thrive in their chosen profession.

Action:

Imagery of building a solid foundation - maybe in a construction manual style (a reference to the students putting things together, with a bit more colour and cartoony). The desk is the law students' foundation, and it's wobbling a bit, and the tools can all be seen to be helping to make it stable. The sense of stability in the foundation is portrayed. The spirit level being on top of the table and zooming in on the spirit level to show the achievement balance - arrows going from negative to positive, a low negative to a not so low negative etc (ie the idea that everyone is different). Perhaps have a student roll out a blueprint



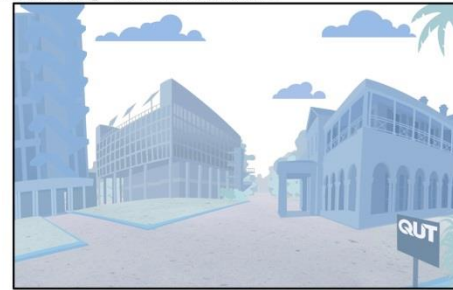
Scene 2: lecture theatre/ white-board.

narration :

This website introduces you to some strategies for improving your mental well-being. Our resources and suggestions are guided by empirical research in the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology considers what goes right with human beings, rather than focussing upon mental illness and what goes wrong.

Action:

Introduce the blackboard (or whiteboard) with formula being written on it when we talk about empirical research. The academic with the tool-belt is the teacher. The teacher is teaching a class which is implied (or there are the top of heads). When talking about what goes right with people, focus on a smiling looking person who is happily shrugging his shoulders as if he doesn't know the answer to a question. Then focus on character who is not looking happy, who is also shrugging their shoulders despondently, as if trying to work out what is going wrong.



Scene 1: lecture theatre/ white-board. (contd').

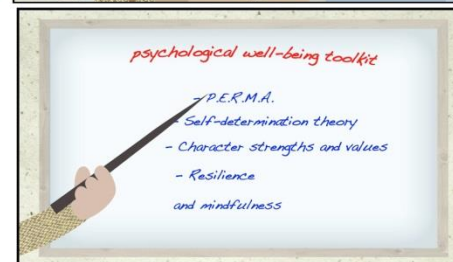
narration :

By understanding and implementing certain strategies related to PERMA, self-determination theory, character strengths and values, resilience, and mindfulness, you begin to build your own psychological well-being toolkit.

Action:

The teacher is pointing to each of these items on a blackboard/white board. No class portrayed in this image - the words are written up on the board.

End of this sequence.



Faculty of law
Resilience Animation project.
Project brief.

Draft 5 script with preliminary visualisations.

Scene 3: non-specific, graphic sequence.

narration :

Throw in positive lifestyle strategies such as eating well, exercising frequently, and getting enough sleep, and you are well on the way to flourishing as a student and future practitioner.

Action:

Slowly zoom in on a character (one of the main characters) with thought bubbles about eating well, exercising and sleeping. Each of the thought bubbles involves some movement (ieg the apple getting cut up, running and the zs floating up from sleeping person). The movement is synchronised as each of the words is said.



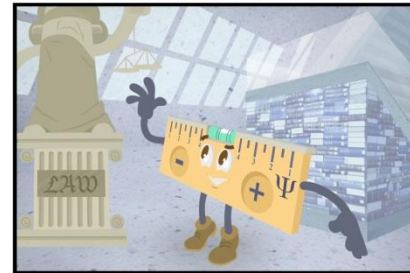
Scene 3: non-specific, graphic sequence.

narration :

In addition, the law curriculum at QUT encourages you to reflect upon what it means to have a positive professional identity as a lawyer. Key themes include lawyers' roles as upholders of the rule of law, as dispute resolvers and as ethical professionals.

Action:

Illustrative pictures of the roles with the tools. Upholding the rule of law is illustrated by the statue of themis (the same as the statue in the background of the library) and the scale is wonky and oscillating and the spirit level comes along and straightens it out. Dispute resolution is shown by two people (the main characters dressed up as lawyers) coming together and shaking hands (tools in the background). (No need to visualise ethics - dispute resolvers and ethical professionals can both be said while the picture of shaking hands is happening).



Scene 4. Quick cut-away to airoplane interior.

narration :

Law is a helping profession, but it is also important to look after your own well-being; to fit your own oxygen mask first before helping others.

Action:

Quick scene involving the students in an aeroplane with the mask dropping down and putting it on.



Scene 5: Graduation time.

narration :

Law school and legal practice can be stressful - but building your toolbox of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes will help you to meet the challenges you face. More than that, these skills will help you to thrive as a member of the new generation of lawyers.

Action:

The toolbox is in the middle of the scene and the tools all run to find their place in the box and they jump in. Then there's an overhead view of the toolbox as it closes. The students come along wearing their graduation robes and hats and pick up the toolbox. The students throw their hats in the air. The camera focuses back on the spinning hats in the air, that magically form together to form a QUT logo.

